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NEWS — SCHOOLS

McCall students tackle literacy campaign

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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McCall Middle School eighth graders Aanya Naik and Siobhan Fisher, along with their classmates, were given action assignments. The students were given elementary age literacy and created a campaign around getting residents to pay attention to the issue. COURTESY PHOTO/AANYA NAIK AND SIOBHAN FISHER

Aanya Naik and Siobhan Fisher never thought much about elementary literacy programs until a class assignment got them motivated to otherwise.

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When the McCall Middle School eighth graders were given action assignments, Naik and Fisher, along with a group of their classmates, were given elementary age literacy as their topic.

An action assignment requires the students to research an issue then figure out how to take action regarding it. The classmates said they thought the kids who received gun control or climate change as their topics had it easier, but in the end, they agreed they learned a lot and appreciated the challenge.

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McCall Middle School student Thomas Buck puts up a flyer about literacy in downtown Winchester. COURTESY PHOTO/AANYA NAIK AND SIOBHAN FISHER

Why literacy?

Elementary literacy became a hot button topic in Winchester after a Boston Globe article said the "balanced literacy curriculum" that Winchester and other school districts like Newton, were using was deemed low quality by the state.

Fisher said the curriculum, "units of study," teaches students to read through pictures rather than sounding out or pronouncing words. It's also been said that children are often taught to guess at words they don't know based on what makes sense relative to the story.

When asked if they remembered using the balanced approach when they were learning to read, both girls said no.

"I remember that they'd say sound it out," said Naik. "And my sister is also learning to read currently, and right now, my mom and me are both encouraging her to sound out the words. So, I honestly never heard of something like that."

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WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT LITERACY ISSUES IN WINCHESTER?
01
ATTENED COMITTEE MEETINGS
Winchester hosts committee meetings often. These meetings are a great source of information. You can attend these meetings to stay more informed
02
HELP YOUR CHILD OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL
Winchester has an excellent school system. However, your child might need extra help outside of school. Reading to or with your child outside of school can greatly impact their success. Flashcards can also be a great source of information.
03
CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE
We created a website hoping to educate others on this issue. Check it out to see what you can do!
04
FOLLOW OUR INSTAGR ACCOUNT
Our Instagram account was created to spread awareness using the power of Social Media. Scan this QR code to see it.
More Information:
https://winchesternews.org/co
ncerned-parents-demand-
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ing-district/

McCall Middle School eighth graders put up these flyers around Winchester, bringing attention to the issue of literacy.

COURTESY PHOTO/AANYA NAIK AND SIOBHAN FISHER

Naik said she is concerned that guessing at words rather than using phonics would impact future generations. She said she worried how the curriculum, coupled with the fact that kids spend more time on social media and screens in general, would affect their literacy and read

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Fisher, however, was quick to point out that while they had heard rumblings from adults, she didn't know literacy among the younger students was an issue until they started their research.

"I don't know if Aanya can agree, but I didn't really realize there was an issue," she said. "And I wouldn't say that I had any issues with reading or literacy in general."

Naik agreed it was the Boston Globe article that brought it home for Winchester parents, who began bringing their concerns to the School Committee meetings in January after the story ran.

"It was really kind of bashing our curriculum and it definitely enraged parents throughout town," she said.

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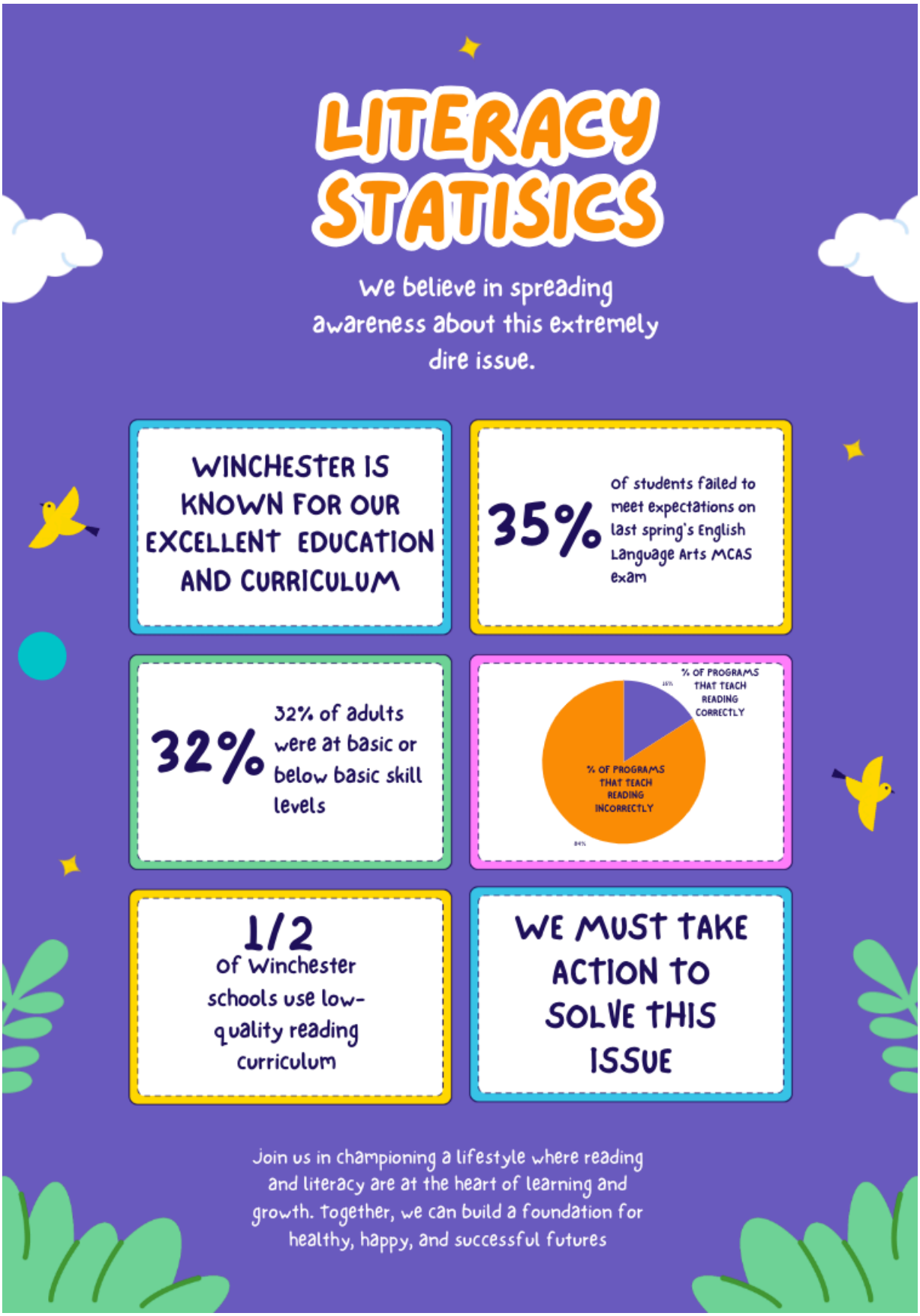
LITERACY STATISICS
We believe in spreading awareness about this extremely dire issue.
WINCHESTER IS KNOWN FOR OUR EXCELLENT EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM
35%
of students failed to meet expectations on last spring's English Language Arts MCAS exam
32%
32% of adults were at basic or below basic skill levels
% OF PROGRAMS THAT TEACH READING CORRECTLY
% OF PROGRAMS THAT TEACH READING INCORRECTLY
1/2
of Winchester schools use low-quality reading curriculum
WE MUST TAKE ACTION TO SOLVE THIS ISSUE
Join us in championing a lifestyle where reading and literacy are at the heart of learning and growth. Together, we can build a foundation for healthy, happy, and successful futures

One of the flyers McCall Middle School students put out in their literacy campaign. COURTESY PHOTO/AANYA NAIK AND SIOBHAN FISHER

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Part of the action assignment is to research an issue thoroughly, in part to make sure they are not putting out any false information, Naik said.

To do that, Naik and Fisher talked to parents and spoke with the head of the English Department. Fisher said the department head told them that not everything in the article was true, and she felt Winchester was being singled out.

But Naik and Fisher still felt the issue was pressing enough that people should be more aware, Naik said.

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Spreading the word on literacy

“We obviously can’t vote,” Naik said. “So we decided to spread awareness about it via infographics, social media and that stuff.”

The pair said they’ve received feedback from both people aware it was an issue and those who had no idea — but do now.

“Some said they wanted to help, but they didn't know how or they didn’t know how big the issue was,” Naik said.

Fisher said it wasn’t surprising to learn that many children they spoke with were unaware of the issue.

“When you’re 10 or 9, you’re not aware of any of that,” she said. “Nor do you want to be aware of that.”

“And I think especially since we’re interviewing kids around our [illegible] they’re not in the thick of it,” Naik said. “Like we’re just starting t[illegible] about issues in our community.”

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Literacy/Reading Issues in Winchester

Overview

Recently, Winchester parents have been pushing for changes in the literacy and reading curriculum within the district. Town and school meetings are being held, although some become too heated, whilst others are getting closer to results.

Boston Globe Article

The Boston Globe published an article on January 11th bashing Winchester's literacy curriculum. This article caused outrage within the Winchester community. Now parents are pushing for a better literacy curriculum.

Parent Testimonials

Parents feel that there needs to be more leadership from both the superintendent and the School Committee. They have come forward for public comment to further speak on this issue claiming that their children are being inadequately prepared for their futures.

School Board Meeting

Since the Boston globe article surffaced there have been many meeting about this topic some have been sucsesful some have not. You can attend one to learn more about this problem.

What our Survey said

We sent out a survey to parents of the Gold Team at McCall. The results showed that most parents are aware of the issue and are moderately happy with the curriculum. Meanwhile, only around half of the students were aware of the issue.

What You Can Do

You can express your voice by showing up to School committee meetings, signing our petition, and making others aware.

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What do McCall Middle School students want Winchester residents to know? Check out their website or follow them on Instagram and find out. COURTESY PHOTO/AANYA NAIK AND SIOBHAN FISHER

She said when she was younger she certainly didn't know of any issues like the literacy problem potentially plaguing the schools today.

"That's also the beauty of this project," Niak continued. "It definitely encouraged, at least me, to have to kind of face this issue and actually take action rather than just think about what I would do about it."

Action

The infographics give a concise overview of the problem and offer ways that people can help make a change. They also use a QR code to give people quick access to the team's website and Instagram account, encourage people to sign a petition and one panel encourages everyone to read.

The students also conducted surveys and interviews and created a social media site and a website.

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McCall Middle School students invite residents to check out their website and social media around the issue of literacy. COURTESY PHOTO/AANYA NAIK AND SIOBHAN FISHER

Naik said she was surprised at the reach the issue drew on social media. She said they picked up way more followers than they thought they would. She also said that about 60% of people surveyed said they'd seen the infographics the team posted not only in school, but around town, which they considered a nice success.

While Naik said the ultimate goal would be to see some sort of change in the curriculum, she knows that could be a long process. Fisher, however, believes they've made a great start.

"I think the first step to that would be starting just with making more people aware," she said. "Because obviously, it's easier to create change if more people are on your side."

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March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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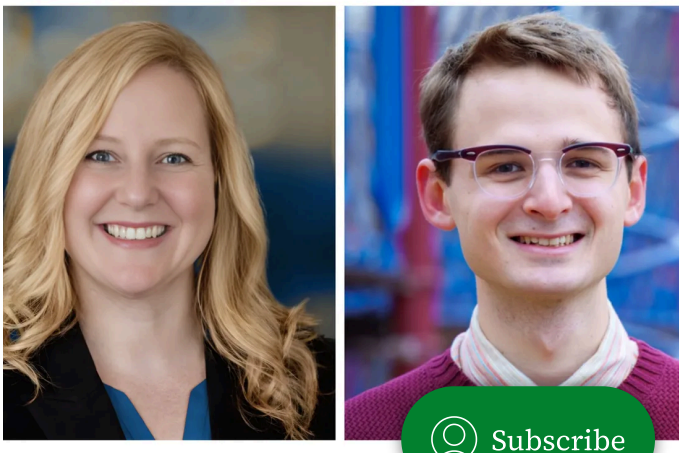

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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